

Organizational identification: A conceptual and operational review

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There is a growing body of literature presenting the argument that processes of organizational identification (OI) are extremely important in helping to ensure that staff work towards the interests of the organization. There are, however, a number of problems with the way that the notion of OI has been conceptualized and operationalized in the extant literature. This paper examines how OI has been defined and measured over a number of decades. A number of problems are identified with how OI has been conceptualized by researchers, including, for example, issues about whether there is an affective element to identification and how the construct relates to organizational commitment. The paper also includes a review of previous approaches to measuring the concept of OI and raises some key problems with existing research tools. The paper concludes by arguing for a particular conceptualization of OI which helps to clarify the complex relationship between identification and organizational commitment, while at the same time accommodating previous definitions of the construct.

Introduction

The notion of organizational identification (OI) has become a central concept in the area of organizational behaviour and is attracting increasing attention in management research more generally. The reason for this is that OI is seen as a key psychological state reflecting the underlying link or bond that exists between the employee and the organization and, therefore, potentially capable of explaining and predicting many important attitudes and behaviours in the workplace. There is a growing literature, presenting the argument that processes of OI are extremely

important in helping to ensure that staff work towards the interests of the organization. A number of authors have suggested, for example, that OI increases the likelihood that staff will stay at the organization, be co-operative with other members, and that, when faced with choices, they will make decisions that are in the organization's strategic interest (Ashforth and Mael 1989; Cheney 1983b; Dutton *et al.* 1994; Elsbach 1999; Rousseau 1998; Van Dick 2001; Van Knippenberg and Van Schie 2000; Whetton and Godfrey 1998).

Those who identify are also more likely to want to go the extra mile on behalf of

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Table 1. A brief outline of recent reviews of OI

Author	Key focus
Ashforth and Mael (1989) Dutton <i>et al.</i> (1994)	Introduced social identity theory into the area of organizational studies and OI. Developed further the discussion of social identity theory and embedded OI within the field of management.
Pratt (1998)	A broad overview of a number of central questions associated with OI (for example conceptual issues and a discussion of antecedents and outcomes).
Van Dick (2001)	Showed how social identity theory could be used to extend and further understand the concept of OC.
Van Dick (2004)	Discussed issues of OI and organizational change and mergers, linkages with commitment, dimensions and foci of identification and links with performance.
Riketta (2005)	Meta-analysis of research into OI and Attitudinal OC.
Riketta and Van Dick (2005)	Meta-analysis of research investigating different foci of OI.

the organization and can help ‘enhance the success of firms’ by engaging in ‘coordinated corporate action’ (Rousseau 1998, 218). Furthermore, as Cheney (1983a) and Tompkins and Cheney (1985) have argued, OI can be seen as a mechanism of persuasion. Through identification, it is argued, employees can be influenced by getting them to buy-in to the organization’s activities. The organization’s goals become the individual’s goals, and those who identify strongly are more likely to be motivated to work hard to help achieve these goals.

Despite research indicating the potential importance of the construct of OI in leading to positive outcomes for the organization, the concept itself still remains in a state of development, with some authors contesting the essence of its meaning (Kreiner and Ashforth 2004; Van Dick 2001). As a consequence, the way the notion has been and is being operationalized in research is also under challenge (Shamir and Kark 2004; Van Dick *et al.* 2004). In other words, after over half a century of discussion in the academic arena, it would seem that there is still considerable disagreement about the nature, meaning and measurement of OI. Given the range of positive outcomes commonly associated with OI, however, it is clearly important to take stock of this situation. In particular, it is important to take a step back and reflect upon the development of OI, the current status of the construct and what key conceptual areas of debate

remain. Additionally, linked to such a discussion, it is also important to review how the notion has been operationalized over the years and what problems there might be with existing measures of the construct.

Over the last 15–20 years a number of reviews of OI have been carried out, many with different aims and objectives. The main reviews, along with a brief summary of their core focus and contribution, are listed in chronological order in Table 1.

Taken together, these various reviews have been very useful in advancing our understanding of the nature of OI, including the measurement and potential conceptual crossovers with the notion of organizational commitment (OC). However, the broad range of most of these contributions has meant that, by and large, existing reviews in the area have not been able to explore in significant depth the core theoretical and methodological issues relating to the conceptualization and measurement of OI. In addition, it is significant to note the lack of consensus surrounding the notion of OI across the different reviews, with key contributions to the area, such as Ashforth and Mael (1989), Dutton *et al.* (1994), Pratt (1998) and Van Dick (2001), all presenting slightly different conceptualizations of this phenomenon as part of their reviews. Moreover, since the publication of the last major review in the area (Van Dick 2004), there have been further developments in the study of OI, with the publication, for example, of new

measures of identification (e.g. Shamir and Kark 2004).

The aim of the present paper is to address this gap in the literature by presenting a systematic and up-to-date review of the OI construct that covers both conceptual and operational issues. A detailed review of this kind is particularly important in the light of Riketta's (2005) recent meta-analysis of OI, showing that many different measures are currently being used to tap identification-based individual-organizational linkages and that there seems to be considerable variation in the relationship between key outcomes and the different operationalizations of identification used. In other words, the specific outcomes found to be associated with OI tend to vary, depending upon how OI is conceptualized and measured, as well as upon the extent to which the measure used has crossovers with the wider notion of OC. This highlights the need for an in-depth analysis of the conceptual and methodological issues surrounding the concept of OI that deals with such key issues. Until these issues are resolved, there remains a risk of confusion when researchers investigate identification, as it is not always clear what psychological state is encapsulated by this very important construct. This is the specific focus of the present review.

Specifically, the aims of the present review are fourfold. First, it aims to review how OI has been conceptualized over the years, including important recent developments in the area. Second, it examines the overlap between OI and OC in order to clarify the boundaries between the phenomena. Third, it examines how OI has been measured and highlights some of the problems with existing measures. Fourth, it presents a conceptual model that can be used to describe sensibly the notion of OI and to demonstrate how it can be distinguished from OC. The overall aim is to help identify some of the key conceptual and operational problems and challenges surrounding the concept of OI as a basis for contributing to the further development of this important area of study.

Problems and Issues in the Conceptualization of Organizational Identification

Early Concept Development

In an early conceptual paper, Foote (1951) argued that human beings tend to identify with 'fellows in groups', that they categorize the social world around them in order to 'regularise their doings', and that 'these categorisations of experience motivate behaviour through the necessary commitment of individuals in all situations' (p. 21). Furthermore, Foote suggested that this identification has a 'compelling or inhibitory effect ... on the release of varying kinds of behaviour' (p. 21). Using this explanation, Foote helps set out what the notion of identification consists of when applied to an organization and also presents an argument as to why the notion is important within a work context. In summary, according to Foote, the individual categorizes him/herself as a member of the organization, and this self-categorization then goes on to motivate individuals to act on behalf of the organization.

Writing almost 20 years after Foote's paper, Brown (1969) presented an empirical paper investigating identification in organizations. Brown used Kelman's (1958) definition as a conceptualization. Kelman originally suggested that: 'identification is a self-defining response, set in a specific relationship', and that an individual 'accepts influence because he wants to establish or maintain a satisfying self-defining relationship to another person or group' (p. 52). Key here is the idea that identification involves a form of relationship between the employee and the organization and that this relationship defines the individual's self-concept. Furthermore, it also means that the organization is able to influence the individual's beliefs in some way.

Picking up on the potential complexity of the notion of OI, when operationalizing the concept, Brown goes on to suggest that a measure 'must include four aspects of

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involvement: attraction to the organisation, consistency of organisational and individual goals, loyalty, and reference of self to organisational membership' (p. 349). These 'constitute the basic components of organisational identification' (p. 349). This approach is one of the most encompassing conceptualizations of the notion, perhaps with the exception of some of the most recent approaches (to be discussed later). By including loyalty, attraction, congruence of goals and reference of self to organizational membership as basic components, the form of identification that Brown is referring to is fairly broad.

At around the same time as Brown, Patchen (1970) conceptualized OI as involving a composite of the following three phenomena: (1) a perception of shared characteristics, where the individual possesses shared interests and goals with other organizational members; (2) a feeling of solidarity, where the individual feels a sense of belongingness to that organization; and (3) support of the organization where the individual supports and defends the organizational goals and policies. On the surface, this appears to be a similar definition to that posed by Brown (1969). However, there are some key differences. Patchen (and subsequently Rotondi 1975) used shared characteristics, support, solidarity and belonging, terms Brown does not refer to. Somewhat problematic here is that such notions are fairly complex in themselves and potentially need further explanation. Patchen defines solidarity as a feeling of 'belonging to, of oneness with, of really being part of some group' (p. 155) also as 'self-labelling' (p. 156), while he defines support as talking up or defending and having loyalty towards the organization. He also suggests that a perception of shared characteristics involves 'cognitive processes based on the perception of similarities between one's self and another person' (p. 156). As an example of the characteristics being referred to, he suggests 'shared goals' (p. 157).

At around the same time as Patchen, a related but distinct approach was also posed by Lee (1969, 1971). Lee linked a number of

different concepts and suggested that identification involves a sense of belongingness, loyalty or shared characteristics. He goes on to suggest that the sense of belongingness can result from common goals shared with others in the organization or as a result of employees feeling that their function within the organization is important in fulfilling their personal needs. Lee also suggests that, where identification with the organization is in the form of loyalty, this relates to attitudes and behaviours that support or defend the organization. These include 'supporting the organisational objectives, taking pride in the tenure in the organisation, or defending the organisation to outsiders' (Lee 1971, 215). The third form of identification with the organization, shared characteristics, 'implies a similarity in quality between the individual and others within the organisation' (1971, 215).

Two further definitions of OI presented by Hall *et al.* (1970) and Schneider *et al.* (1971) are worth mentioning in this context. The core of their two definitions involves the individual accepting the organization's values and goals, to the point that these values and goals become the individual's own. Apparently, this goal and value acceptance, and their integration into the individual's own value and goal system leads to a degree of emotional commitment to the organization. This use of emotional commitment distinguishes their approach from that of other writers at the time. In summary, at around the same time, four separate conceptualizations were being presented that seem broadly similar, although when considered together, they span an extremely wide range of psychological notions.

One of the more influential writers in the area of OI that seems to stand out over the years is George Cheney. Cheney comes from a slightly different perspective from the more traditional positivist organizational behaviour theorists who have written in the area, as he writes from a communication or discourse perspective. Cheney draws heavily on the writings of Burke (1937), who presented the notion of identification as a vehicle or tool for

persuasion and fostering 'participation in a collective social role' (Burke 1937, 144). Cheney (1983a,b) defined OI as 'an active process by which individuals link themselves to elements in the social scene' (1983a, 342). To Cheney: 'a person acts to identify with some target(s), i.e., persons, families, groups, collectives; and to a lesser extent values, goals, knowledge, activities, objects' (1983a, 145), thus 'a person may think of himself as belonging to some special body' (Burke 1937, 268).

Cheney and Tompkins (1987) argue that identification can be seen as a process of the appropriation of identity involving the 'development and maintenance of an individual's or a group's sameness or substance' (p. 5). Identification includes 'the development and maintenance of symbolic linkages salient for the individual/group' (p. 5). As such, Cheney and Tompkins present the notion of OI as both a process, referring to the process of identification development, and a product or the end result of the development of identification.

In discussing the process of identification, Cheney and Tompkins draw heavily on discursive perspectives, where talk and discourse are seen as vehicles for the construction of identity and, subsequently, identification. This approach can be seen as part of a separate arm of the literature when discussing OI. The notion that identity is fluid and subject to change and that it is constructed and framed in discourse is an approach that is distinct from the more mainstream positivist approach. Despite their potentially contentious ontological position (an area for debate which falls outside the scope of this review), Cheney's writings can, as discussed more fully below, be extremely useful in helping to clarify what the notion of OI consists of.

The Introduction of Social Identity Theory

One of the dominant approaches to OI in the literature over the last 15 years is that associated with social identity theory (the original proponents of which were Tajfel (1978b) and Tajfel and Turner (1979)). This approach

suggests that individuals have effectively categorized themselves into a perceived group (in this case the organization). The writers in this approach include Ashforth and Mael (1989), Dutton *et al.* (1994), Elsbach (1999) and many other researchers, such as Van Knippenberg and Van Schie (2000) and Van Dick (2001).

The main thrust of the social identity theory approach is that identification involves the assumption that the self-image has two components: a personal identity and a number of social identities. Proponents of the theory suggest that human beings need to simplify the social world by categorizing people into groups (i.e. gender, race, nationality etc.) and that people assign themselves (or are assigned by others) as being members of a particular group or category. Arguably, individuals can assign themselves membership of a number of different social groups or categories in the construction of their self-concept (specifically the social part of their identity). This social categorization is only one particular feature of social identity theory (and has been elaborated within the confines of self-categorization theory). The other part of the theory is the tenet that individuals have a tendency for social comparison in order to make sense of the world. Furthermore, people often compare themselves with other people on the basis of their membership of a particular group. Additionally, the individual has self-esteem needs involving the need to have positive self-regard, and people will try to enhance a positive self-image either by trying to enhance their personal identity or by trying to enhance their social identity. As such, in assigning themselves (either consciously or unconsciously) as members of a particular social group or category, they will often be motivated by the need to ensure that this particular category is a source of positive identity and that it compares well with other potential social categories. The main tenets of social identity theory have laid the foundation for one of the dominant approaches to OI over the last two decades.

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Ashforth and Mael (1989) suggested that individuals who have OI are effectively categorizing themselves into a social category, that social category being the organization for which they work. As such, OI is a specific form of 'social identification' (p. 22). In their key paper, they argued that identification involves the individual having 'perceived him or herself as psychologically inter-twined with the fate of the group'. They argued that previous research confused OI with other concepts, and 'this confusion has impeded application of the rich findings of social identification to organisations' (p. 23). Over recent years, many researchers have tried to remedy this situation.

In an extensive review of the literature, Dutton *et al.* (1994) took social identity theory and applied it to OI with some further refinements. They suggest that OI can be defined as the extent to which an individual's self-concept contains the same attributes as those of the perceived organizational identity. Furthermore, Dutton *et al.* suggest that a person has a strong OI when: '1) his or her identity as an organisation member is more salient than alternative identities; and 2) his or her self-concept has many of the same characteristics he or she believes define the organisation as a social group' (p. 239). To some degree, these further refinements are similar to those presented by Brown (1969), Lee (1969) and Patchen (1970), who discuss shared characteristics, goals and beliefs between the individual and the organization. Yet, this approach can be seen as taking the notion of OI one step further, in that it uses social identity theory and makes an explicit reference to the incorporation of aspects of the organization's identity (whether goals, values or characteristics) into the individual's own sense of self.

More generally, according to this approach, the organization is a big part of the employee's self-concept (the most salient perhaps). Furthermore, Dutton *et al.* (1994) believe that individuals share similar characteristics as 'the organisation as a social group' (p. 239). More specifically, OI will involve a

state where: 'a member's self-concept has incorporated a large part of what he or she believes is distinctive, central and enduring about the organisation into what he or she believes is distinctive, central and enduring about him or herself' (p. 242). When referring to the notion of shared characteristics, previous authors such as Patchen (1970) have suggested that the shared characteristics are with other members rather than the organization. Dutton *et al.* (1994) use the notion of organizational identity and imbue the organization with characteristics that the individual is expected to share.

A slightly different position on OI, one less steeped in social identity theory, is that proposed by Rousseau (1998). As part of her explanation of what the concept involves, she suggests that 'identification refers to a cognitive state ... Identification is a cognition of self in relation to the organisation' (p. 218). This in itself is similar to what other writers include in an explanation of OI (including social identity theorists). However, what makes Rousseau's conceptualization unique is that she distinguishes between situated and deep structure identification.

According to Rousseau, situated identification is where individuals in the organization carry out work that is expected of them in their role. In such circumstances, situational cues help encourage a perception of shared interests between the individual and the organization. Often in the work place, organizational members are working towards super-ordinate goals and, when this occurs, the individual begins to see him or herself as a member of a group working towards a particular goal. The perceived shared interests, where individuals see themselves as part of a larger organizational identity, is what Rousseau refers to as situated identification. This is an elemental form of identification that can form fairly quickly and can also disappear once particular super-ordinate situational cues are removed and particular job roles are no longer carried out. Deep structure identification, however, is identification that has a much

greater impact on the individual. Deep structure identification is where the individual has created such a link with the organization that an enduring cognitive schema exists whereby the employment relationship has in some way altered the mental model that the individual has of him or herself. The organizational entity has, in effect, been incorporated into the self-concept. In short, the organization becomes a part of the individual's self-concept.

Very recently, Van Dick (2001) and Van Dick *et al.* (2004) have extended the debate about exactly what OI consists of, developing the concept further. Specifically, Van Dick (2001) argues that previous propositions put forward by social identity theory did not go far enough in taking advantage of the full scope of the theory and, in a number of papers (Van Dick 2001, 2004; Van Dick *et al.* 2004), extends the explanatory scope of earlier social identity theory tenets to expand the conceptualization of OI. Van Dick and his colleagues (2004) argue that identification consists of four sub-components: an affective component, a cognitive component, an evaluative component and a behavioural component.

Van Dick's work significantly extends the conceptual boundaries of the notion, while remaining within the confines of social identity theory. In particular, of considerable significance is the addition of a behavioural (conative) component which takes the construct beyond a subjective state into one which includes actual behaviour (more specifically 'participation in action' p. 276). In effect, this extends the boundaries of OI into the conceptual sphere of OC. In the process, however, Van Dick and his colleagues also succeed in integrating many social psychological and social identity theory processes into the analysis of OC and in showing how social identity theory can help us better understand commitment in the workplace. This is in itself an important contribution to the organizational behaviour literature. However, by significantly expanding the conceptualization of OI into the behavioural sphere, it becomes more difficult to distinguish between identifi-

cation and commitment. This, as will be discussed in greater detail later, can be problematic, as these two constructs are best left separate.

In summary, when reflecting on how the notion of OI has developed over the past 50 years, the present review shows that even though there are many overlaps and superficial similarities in the way authors have conceptualized the phenomenon, there has also been considerable variation in the way OI has been defined and approached in the literature. The concept of OI has been linked to: belongingness (Lee 1971; Patchen 1970); loyalty (Brown 1969; Lee 1971; Patchen 1970); involvement (Brown 1969); attraction to the organization (Brown 1969); consistency of organizational and individual goals (Brown 1969); reference of self to organizational membership (Brown 1969); shared characteristics (Brown 1969; Lee 1971; Patchen 1970); perceived similarity of characteristics (Dutton *et al.* 1994); individuals' acceptance of the organization's goals and values (Schneider *et al.* 1971); integration of the organizational goals and values as the individual's own (Hall *et al.* 1970); emotional commitment (Schneider *et al.* 1971); emotional attachment (Van Dick 2001), self-categorization or social identification (Ashforth and Mael 1989); self-referential or self-defining beliefs (Pratt 1998); a cognition of self in relationship to the organization (Rousseau 1998); and a feeling of solidarity (Patchen 1970; Rotondi 1975). As this illustrates, different authors use different psychological notions when conceptualizing OI. These notions undoubtedly share certain similarities but, fundamentally, the specifics of the definitions involved suggest that the nature of identification differs somewhat from one conceptualization to the next. Table 2 briefly summarizes how OI has been presented by key contributors to the area (as discussed above). In particular, it identifies some of the core concepts used and the key definitional features that serve to distinguish the main conceptualizations proposed in the literature over the past 30 years.

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It is evident from Table 2 and from the review presented above that existing conceptualizations of OI seem to cover many different psychological phenomena. This, clearly, presents problems. As de Vaus (1991) argues 'if concepts have no set meaning anyone can define a concept in any way they wish' (p. 48), and this in turn makes theoretical progress in the area much more difficult to achieve. In addition, however, there are some specific areas of conceptual confusion. There are two key issues that stand out in this respect and which therefore deserve closer attention. First, as some authors have noted (Bergami and Bagozzi 1996; Harquail 1998; Van Dick 2001), there is considerable debate as to whether identification has an affective and/or a cognitive element to it. Second, and perhaps most problematic, is the confusion between OC and OI. Each of these issues is examined in greater detail below.

Affective Identification?

There is widespread consensus in the literature that identification involves a strong linkage between the individual and the organization. However, authors disagree with regard to the extent to which the linkage should be seen as cognitive or affective in nature. Some researchers argue that there may be affective elements to OI (Abrams and de Moura 2001; Bergami and Bagozzi 1996; Schneider *et al.* 1971; Van Dick 2001), while others suggest that these affective aspects are only outcomes of cognitive identification, which is the core of OI (Ashforth and Mael 1989; Bergami and Bagozzi 2000; Rousseau 1998). Rousseau, for example, argues that 'identification is a cognition of self in relation to the organisation', but suggests that 'identification can also shape and be shaped by an individual's affective reaction to the

Table 2. A brief summary of the main conceptualizations of OI

Author	Definition – where provided	Main sub-concepts/key features:
Brown (1969)	Identification is a self-defining response, set in a specific relationship between the individual and the organization.	Four aspects of involvement: Attraction to the organization Consistency of organizational and individual goals Loyalty toward the organization Reference of self to organizational membership (p. 349).
Lee (1969, 1971)	'OI is assumed to be the degree of the individual's broad personal identification with the organisation' (1971, 215).	<i>Belongingness</i> resulting from common goals shared with others or employees feeling that their function fulfils their personal needs; <i>loyalty</i> , attitudes and behaviours including 'supporting the organisational objectives, taking pride in the tenure in the organisation, or defending the organisation to outsiders' (1971, 215), and <i>shared characteristics</i> , 'implies a similarity in quality between the individual and others within the organisation' (1971, 215).
Patchen (1970)	–	A <i>perception of shared characteristics</i> with organizational members, shared interests and goals with other organizational members; a feeling of <i>solidarity</i> with the organization, a sense of belongingness to that organization, and <i>support of the organization</i> where the individual supports and defends the organizational goals and policies.
Hall <i>et al.</i> (1970) and Schneider <i>et al.</i> (1971)	'Organisational identification is the process by which the goals of	Goal and value acceptance. Emotional commitment to the organization.

Table 2. *Continued*

Author	Definition – where provided	Main sub-concepts/key features:
	the organisation and those of the individual become increasingly integrated or congruent' (1970, pp. 176–177).	
Cheney (1983a)	'Identification – with organisations or anything else – is an active process by which individuals link themselves to elements in the social scene' (p. 342).	'A person acts to identify with some target(s), i.e., persons, families, groups, collectives; and to a lesser extent values, goals, knowledge, activities, objects. Thus a person may think of himself as belonging to some special body' (1983a, 145). Cheney and Tompkins, (1987): Organisational identification as a process, of identification development, and as a product or the end result of development of identification where the individual has a strong bond with the organisation.
Ashforth and Mael (1989)	'Organisational identification is a specific form of social identification' and 'the perception of oneness with, or belongingness to the organisation' (p. 22).	Social Identification components: Self-categorization, a perception that an individual is psychologically intertwined with the fate of the organization and an incorporation of the organization's values and attitudes.
Dutton <i>et al.</i> (1994)	'The degree to which a member defines him or herself by the same attributes that he or she believes define the organisation' (p. 239).	'1) His or her identity as an organisation member is more salient than alternative identities, and 2) his or her self-concept has many of the same characteristics he or she believes define the organisation as a social group' (p. 239).
Pratt (1998)	'Organisational Identification occurs when an individual's beliefs about his or her organisation become self-referential or self-defining' (p.172).	Involving the integration of 'beliefs about one's organisation into one's identity' (p. 172) and that 'identification explicitly refers to the social aspects of a persons identity' (p. 173).
Rousseau (1998)	'Identification is a psychological state wherein an individual perceives himself or herself to be part of a larger whole . . . Organisational identification, wherein individuals perceive themselves to be part of a larger organisation' (p. 217).	'Identification is a cognition of self in relation to the organisation' (p. 218). <i>Situated identification</i> : Individuals carry out work that is expected of them in their role and situational cues that encourage a perception of shared interests. <i>Deep structure identification</i> ; an enduring cognitive schema exists whereby the employment relationship has in some way altered the mental model that the individual has of him or herself.
Van Dick (2001)	As with Ashforth and Mael (1989) – Links to social identity theory and self-categorization theory.	<i>Affective</i> component: Emotional attachment to the group. <i>Cognitive</i> component: Knowledge of being a member. <i>Evaluative</i> component: Positive evaluation of the organization (e.g. Pride). <i>Behavioural</i> (conative) component: Including actual behaviour – more specifically 'participation in action'.

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organisation' (p. 218). Drawing on the self-categorization elements of social identity theory, Ashforth and Mael (1989) adopt an even more explicitly cognitive approach to OI, suggesting that previous researchers have 'confused the concept ... with affect' (p. 23). More generally, as a number of writers have noted (e.g. Bergami and Bagozzi 1996; Harquail 1998), the main focus of the cognitive approaches tends to be on self-categorization and goal and value congruence, which are related to the thinking aspects of identification rather than the feeling aspects that are commonly associated with affective identification. Not surprisingly, cognitively oriented authors often present quite a dry and computational picture of the phenomenon, reducing it to quasi-information processing and storage. At the same time though, they explicitly discuss OI in terms of a self-organizational linkage that involves an attachment with the organization and a relationship or a sense of belongingness (e.g. Ashforth and Mael 1989; Rousseau 1998). In other words, even researchers who view OI as mainly involving a cognitive process of self-categorization write about OI using potentially quite emotive terms.

Affectively oriented authors do not necessarily deny the importance of cognitive factors and, in particular, of cognitive processes of self-categorization for OI. Rather, they tend to emphasize the fact that this sense of attachment and belonging that is found when somebody identifies is likely to be emotionally laden and to carry significant emotional connotation, particularly since the process of identification itself involves the individual's self-concept becoming linked to the organization in a deep and meaningful way. Thus, as Dutton *et al.* (1994) argue, the stronger a person's OI, the more salient the organization is over alternative identities. Similarly, Van Dick (2001) suggests that, for an individual, realizing that he or she is a member of a certain category is a necessary first step to identifying with that category, but that there is more to identification than just self-categorization. Identification also directly involves and

engages individuals' feelings and emotions. This is in line with core social identity theory arguments emphasized by Tajfel (1972, 1978b) who, as noted by Bergami and Bagozzi (1996), explicitly suggested that social identity involves both the individual having knowledge that they belong to certain groups as well there being an emotional significance that goes hand in hand with this process. More generally, central to affective approaches to OI is the idea that OI emphasizes both emotional and cognitive elements and that, as a result, it cannot be properly understood without taking into account both components. This more comprehensive view of OI is reflected in a number of recent contributions to the area (Bergami and Bagozzi 1996; Harquail 1998; Van Dick 2001). Combining the cognitive and affective elements, Harquail (1998) argued that 'OI engages more than our cognitive self-categorization and our brains, it engages our hearts' (p. 225). She firmly presents the argument that affective identification can be seen as conceptually distinct from cognitive identification, although she recognizes that the two components may be difficult to separate in practice. In a similar vein, Bergami and Bagozzi (1996) suggest that there are both cognitive and emotional aspects to OI. Specifically, they argue that when one identifies with an organization, a mental schema exists, which has a cognitive element as well as an emotional aspect, and that, when this schema is triggered, emotions attached to it may be excited at the same time.

Finally, in one of the most recent contributions to the area already mentioned, Van Dick (2001) also suggests that previous authors have mainly drawn a cognitive element from social identity theory when applying it to an organizational arena and that it is important to include an affective element as a key part of the construct. Indeed, Van Dick presents affective identification as a central component of a broader model of OI. In summary, despite some continuing debate as to whether OI has an affective component, it seems difficult to maintain the position that OI is purely cognitive

in nature, but this is a view that is reflected in the more comprehensive conceptualizations of OI that have appeared in recent years.

Organizational Identification and Commitment Linkages

A major problem that exists when trying to clarify the meaning of OI is that of conceptual overlap with other individual–organizational constructs, in particular with OC. There are important similarities in fact in the way that OI and OC have not only been conceptualized, but also in the way they have been operationalized over the years (operationalization issues will be discussed later). These similarities are partly due to the fact that both concepts are meant to tap into and describe very similar psychological states, to the extent that some conceptualizations of OC actually include identification as a sub-concept. Organizational commitment research dates back to around the same time as the earlier studies into OI (e.g. Buchanan 1974; Hrebiniak and Allutto 1972; Porter *et al.* 1974). If anything, however, OC has been even more heavily researched than OI (see the meta-analysis of Mathieu and Zajonc (1990), Meyer *et al.* (2002) and a recent review of the concept by Swailes (2002)), resulting in a plethora of different definitions and conceptualizations being presented over the years. There are, however, three dominant conceptualizations of OC that can be identified in the literature. These are summarized below.

First, Mowday *et al.* (1979) proposed what can be considered to be the first of these dominant conceptualizations, where OC is defined as: ‘the strength of an individual’s identification-with and involvement-in a particular organisation’ (p. 604). They suggested that this involved: (a) a strong belief in and acceptance of the organization’s goals and values; (b) a willingness to exert considerable effort on behalf of the organization; and (c) a desire to maintain membership. Immediately, we can see some major similarities with how identification has been conceptualized. Secondly, Cook and Wall (1980) defined OC in terms of:

identification, involvement and loyalty. Their conceptualization of the term identification here involved ‘Pride in the organisation; internalisation of the organisation’s goals and values’ (p. 40). Involvement consisted of: ‘willingness to invest personal effort as a member of the organisation, for the sake of the organisation’ (p. 41) and loyalty was defined as ‘affection for and attachment to the organisation; a sense of belongingness manifesting as a wish to stay’ (p. 40). Again, we can see considerable crossovers between OC and OI.

Most recently, Meyer and Allen (1991) suggested that OC consists of three components: affective commitment, continuance commitment and normative commitment. They define affective commitment as: ‘the employee’s emotional attachment to, identification with, and involvement in the organisation’ (p. 67). Continuance commitment refers to: ‘an awareness of the costs associated with leaving the organization, employees whose primary link to the organization is based on continuance commitment remain because they need to do so’. Normative commitment refers to: ‘a feeling of obligation to continue employment, those with a high level of normative commitment feel that they ought to remain with the organisation’ (p. 67). As can be seen in the Meyer *et al.* (2002) meta-analysis, the most used measure of commitment of these three sub-components is affective commitment, as it goes to the heart of what authors tend to refer to when discussing commitment.

When one looks at how OI and OC are described, it is apparent that authors are often using the same terms to describe the different concepts. The notion of involvement was used in the conceptualization of OC by Cook and Wall (1980), Mowday *et al.* (1979) and also Meyer and Allen (1991). Involvement was also used in the conceptualization of OI by Brown (1969) and more recently by Van Dick (2001). Similarly, loyalty was used as part of the conceptualization of OC by Cook and Wall (1980) as well as being used to conceptualize OI by Brown (1969), Lee (1969, 1971) and Patchen (1970). All authors have

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suggested that OC involves some form of congruence between the individual's goals and values and those of the organization. This is also presented as a key aspect of OI by almost all the researchers in the area. Additionally, the idea that there is a feeling of membership, belonging and attachment is also a common theme in how both OI and OC have been conceptualized.

Owing to the apparent risk of concept redundancy (an issue raised specifically with the notion of OC by Morrow (1983)), it is an important exercise to clarify the crossovers between the two notions. This is especially important when certain researchers refer to the two notions as if they are totally separate concepts. For example, Rousseau (1998) states that: 'Identification is a cognition-of-self in relationship to the organisation while citizenship is a behaviour and commitment is an affective response' (p. 218). Similarly, Bergami and Bagozzi (2000) argue that the two concepts are separate and that 'organisational identification and organisational commitment are two components of one's social identity in the organisation' (p. 556). While Pratt suggests that the two concepts can be distinguished on the basis that 'identification explains the individual-organisation relationship in terms of an individual's self-concept, organisational commitment does not' (p. 178).

The extent to which authors see OI and commitment as distinct clearly varies with the particular definitions and measures used to determine the actual degree of conceptual and operational overlap involved. More generally, though, problems of overlap in this area are made worse by two main factors. First, as we have seen, there is no real agreement in the literature as to the definition of either OI or OC (Swales 2002). Second, researchers in this area are, in any case, attempting to differentiate concepts that fundamentally overlap, in particular on the basis of overlapping sub-concepts (like a busy Venn diagram). For example, concepts that have been linked to OI, such as membership or belongingness, would seem to be inextricably associated with

notions of loyalty, attachment or solidarity often used in relation to OC, as well as overlapping with more general notions of emotional links and affective commitment. Many (if not all) of these concepts are actually used to define the others as well as the more general constructs of OC and OI. As such, it is perhaps not surprising that, conceptually, OI and OC have often been confused over the years. Moreover, disentangling the two constructs is made all the more difficult by the fact that they both refer to almost the same broad phenomenon, that of a strong individual-organizational linkage.

Disentangling Organizational Identification from Organizational Commitment: A Proposed Model

While recognizing that a large number of partly different and partly overlapping constructs (and sub-constructs) have been used to define both OI and OC, there are two key points worth emphasizing in this context. First, most of the definitions of OC, as we have seen, have at least three aspects to them. Second, OI is usually one of, or part of, these sub-concepts. As such, it seems more sensible to distinguish between the two by saying that OC includes, in some form, OI. OC seems, almost deliberately, to have a number of components that make it a global measure where, if present, a number of positive employee and/or organizational outcomes can be reasonably expected to follow.

To a degree, one of the most successful attempts at distinguishing between identification and commitment is that by Cheney and Tompkins (1987). These writers are able to distinguish between the two notions by suggesting that identification refers to a process and positing that it covers the substance of action patterns, while commitment refers to the form these action patterns take. Identification is the 'appropriation of identity and commitment is the binding to action' (p. 9). Cheney and Tompkins (1987) draw on Kanter (1972) in presenting this distinction: 'in

Kanter's view, then, commitment becomes a profound and expressive outcome of an individual's linkage of the self to a collective over time' (p. 8). Importantly here, Cheney and Tompkins emphasize commitment as an expression of an individual's identification through behavioural (or intentional) pledges. Fundamentally though, it is somewhat problematic to discuss the two notions as completely separate constructs, especially because when defining the two notions, authors, as we have seen, are seemingly talking about a very similar thing – a strong linkage between the individual and the organization. Despite this, however, the Cheney distinction can help us to differentiate between the two notions and clarify what can reasonably be seen to fall within the boundaries of OI.

More generally, it can be argued that conceptual boundaries around identification can be considered to be limited to a specific subjective state of the individual. This subjective state does not include individuals' evaluative reactions to the organization, such as having pride in the organization that can be considered secondary to this primary subjective state. Nor does it include individuals' intentions to act or actual behaviours, such as their intention to stay in the organization or various forms of organizational citizenship behaviours. In contrast, OC is a more encompassing construct which includes the subjective state of OI plus certain psychological states that would be considered to follow if a person identified with an organization. These include states such as willingness or intention to participate in activities which benefit the organization, a positive evaluation of the organization and intention to stay at the organization. These would be further along the path structure of the nomological model relating to OI. Figure 1 illustrates what can reasonably be expected to fall within the conceptual domain of OI, what psychological states might follow from this and how this might compare with OC.

Importantly, with respect to the most recent model of OI presented by Van Dick (2001),

the evaluative and conative forms of identification included in his construct can, from the point of view of the present conceptualization, be considered to be outcomes which are secondary to, rather than defining characteristics of, OI. Secondary states, such as positive evaluations of the organization and feelings of pride by members, are presented here as secondary consequences of identifying with the organization, in the sense that identification potentiates these states.

The rationale for this is that, although social identity theory suggests that identification involves an evaluative component, such an element may not be necessary for somebody actually to identify with an organization, whereas, without a cognitive or affective element, it would be difficult to argue that a person did indeed identify with the organization. In addition to this, as Jackson (2002) shows, identification can lead to an exaggerated positive evaluation of the in-group. Hence, it could be argued that positive evaluations, rather than being a constituent or core part of OI, are actually likely to follow or be an outcome of cognitive and affective identification.

The model presented here does not radically depart from the boundaries of social identity theory. What it does do, however, is integrate many of the ways in which identification has been conceptualized over the years and, in the process, it helps to clarify the boundaries between identification and commitment, drawing on many of the psychological processes and foundations of social identity theory.

Problems and Issues in the Measurement of Organizational Identification

Validity Issues and Evaluation Criteria

Where particular psychological constructs are of central interest to a research programme, great care must be applied when considering how to operationalize and measure these constructs. Moving on from conceptual issues,

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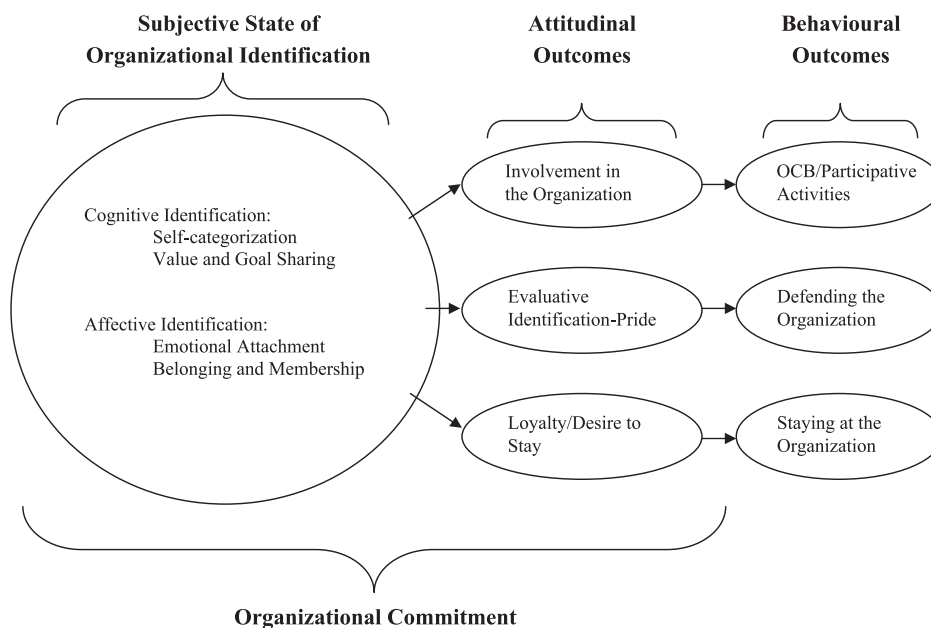


Figure 1. Conceptual nomological model of OI.

this section provides a critical review of how a number of researchers have operationalized the notion of OI. In particular, five approaches to the operationalization of OI are considered here. Taken together, these approaches provide a good representation of the main ways in which OI has been operationalized by researchers in this area. Note that the aim of this review is not necessarily to provide a detailed critique of each measure but rather to demonstrate particular problems that exist with some of the main measures of OI used by researchers in this area.

Before examining the relevant measures, however, it is worth noting that there is a wide range of research that has been carried out investigating various forms of identification (for details, see Haslam 2004; Hogg and Abrams 1988; Van Dick *et al.* 2005), and that there are many measures that have been used to tap different targets of identification, Haslam (2004) presents examples of many of these. However, the review below will concentrate explicitly on key measures of OI.

The first two approaches to measurement reviewed below, which represent some of the earliest operationalizations of the construct, are those of Brown (1969) and Hall *et al.* (1971). The third is the Organizational Identification Questionnaire (OIQ) constructed by Cheney (1982). This is presented because it has been used by a number of researchers. The fourth is the measure used in a study by Mael and Ashforth (1992), which has become the main scale used to measure OI. Finally, a single item graphic measure of identification is also considered. This last measure has been selected because it is one of the most recent measures to be presented in the literature.

There are a number of ways in which the measure or scale of a given construct might be evaluated. One way to is to consider its validity. There are many ways in which the validity of a measure can be tested. The various forms of validity include: face validity, content validity, construct, concurrent, discriminant, convergent and criterion validity. The first two

forms of validity, face and content validity, are the main focus considered in the present review. Face validity refers to whether, upon simple inspection, the measures can be considered to be a sensible instrument to tap the construct at hand. Content validity, in contrast, assesses whether particular items on a scale actually tap or relate to specific domains of the construct as defined. The evaluation of existing measures below will mainly be limited to these two forms of validity, since these are the most relevant from the point of view of the present discussion.

It is of course essential when operationalizing a mental phenomenon such as OI that there is a clear relationship between how the phenomenon is conceptualized and how it is then measured. Without this clear link, research that attempts to test certain aspects of either the psychological or the social world around us can be viewed with some scepticism, as there will be a lack of construct validity. As de Vaus (1991) argued: 'When developing indicators for concepts, the task is not to find indicators which match some concept which has a set definition, it is to first define the concept and then develop indicators for the concept as it has been defined' (p. 48).

As argued by Morrow (1983) in a conceptual and operational analysis of the notion of work commitment, when operationalizing a mental phenomenon, it is essential that researchers show clear linkages between a conceptual definition and a measurement procedure. The strength of this epistemic correlation is a key methodological concern that the researcher needs to heed when approaching the operationalization of a construct. If there fails to be a close relationship between how a concept is defined and how it is measured, there is a risk of deficiency (when aspects of, or variability in, the concept are not measured by a particular operational tool) and/or contamination (where there is variability in the measure not relating to the concept it is attempting to measure). Morrow raised these points with respect to the measurement of

work commitment and suggested that research carried out where there are deficient or contaminated measures tends to contribute to the formation of redundant concepts. The issues raised by Morrow are equally relevant to the notion of OI.

Five main concerns are raised in the following review of measures. First, identification measures used by researchers are often lacking in content validity, since they do not always seem to correspond to how the notion is conceptualized and, as such, may not always be measuring exactly what authors had intended. Second, some of the operationalizations risk contamination in that certain measures are so broad that they are likely to be tapping a wide variety of psychological constructs over and above OI (including possible outcomes of identification). Third, related to the second issue, some authors may be borrowing scales originally designed to measure other psychological constructs without too much critical reflection. Fourth, because of the conceptual confusion between the notions of OI and OC, some operationalizations seem to be measuring aspects which might equally be expected to be part of the broader concept of OC rather than identification. All of these four issues challenge the general validity of the measures involved and, as such, raise serious questions about the instruments under review. In addition to this, in places, the face validity of some of the scales will also be questioned.

Early Measures of Organizational Identification

One of the earliest attempts at measuring OI (Brown 1969) can be seen as an example of a low epistemic correlation between an operationalization and a conceptualization. Brown conceptualized OI as attraction to the organization, consistency of organizational and situational goals, loyalty and reference of self to organizational membership. However, the actual operationalization of this construct measures a number of notions not necessarily related to the conceptualization. For example,

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the second phase of Brown's measure asks questions relating to management and employee interests or goals, and reference is also made to how such relations compare with organizations in the private sector. It is not clear, however, what sub-component, if any, this part of the scale is linked to. More generally, Brown's scale as a whole does not seem to be measuring the construct as defined and, therefore, risks deficiency and contamination due to the lack of epistemic correlation. In addition, there are also possible problems of face validity with the scale. Some of the items in fact seem to be very hypothetical and/or complex, making it difficult to interpret. Overall, therefore, Brown's OI scale is an example of a measure that tends to suffer from a lack of both construct and face validity.

Similar problems apply to the OI scale used in a series of studies published in the early 1970s, Hall *et al.* (1970) and Schneider *et al.* (1971). The first part of the measure comprises a set of seven items borrowed and modified from Lodahl and Kejner (1965), originally a 20-item job involvement scale. Although the face validity of this scale is reasonable, there seems to be very little connection between how Hall *et al.* (1970) conceptualize the notion of OI and these seven items included in the scale, hence raising problems of content validity. In particular, the authors conceptualize OI as an integration or congruence between the values and goals of the organization and the individual. However, none of the items in the scale refers specifically or directly to the goals or the values of either the individual or the organization. In fact, most of the items are broadly phrased, to the extent that it is likely that there will be variance in the final construct measured that will not just be due to the extent to which respondents identify with the organization. Thus, contamination is likely to occur.

Selected Later Operationalizations

This section reviews two later influential contributions to the measurement of OI that have

been widely used by researchers in the area over the past 20 years. These are the scales developed by Cheney (1982) and Mael and Ashforth (1992), respectively. It also considers a less traditional graphic scale of OI more recently proposed by Bergami and Bagozzi (2000) and Shamir and Kark (2004).

Cheney's (1982) original OIQ included 25 items 'designed to reflect three identifiable, but not analytically distinct "components" [of OI] isolated by Patchen (1970) as membership, loyalty and similarity' (p. 349). The items involved, however, seem to cover many potential concepts over and above the various sub-dimensions of identification included in the outlined conceptualization. Specifically, Cheney's questionnaire seems to be measuring: value congruence; pride in the organization; perceived homogeneity of organizational member values; self-description as a member; citizenship behaviour; loyalty; sharing in the successes and failures of the organization; a perception that the organization cares about the respondent; a tendency to talk about the organization to others; a feeling that the organization is a family; concern for the fate of the organization; having warm feelings about the organization; and a recognition of the organization's success. Such a wide range of items will almost definitely be accessing concepts beyond the particular definition or conceptualization presented and therefore raises the problem of a lack of content validity.

In addition, important questions need to be asked of the likely discriminant validity of Cheney's OIQ. Despite a high level of reliability being reported ($\alpha = 0.95$, Cheney 1983b) the wide coverage of his measure means that the items are almost certainly tapping into antecedents of OI and also potential outcomes of identification. It would be surprising if the Cheney measure were not in some way related to a large number of wider psychological notions. Despite this, Cheney's questionnaire has been used by a number of researchers over the years (e.g. Apker and Fox 2002; Russo 1998; Scott 1997; Scott *et al.* 1999).

Another key operationalization is the short six-item OI scale proposed by Mael and Ashforth (1992). Despite the fact that Mael and Ashforth define organisational identification as 'the perception of oneness with an organisation' (p. 104), their OI scale is based on six items taken directly from a pre-existing scale of Identification with a Psychological Group developed by Mael and Tetrick (1992) and mainly designed to measure the extent to which people feel that they share experiences with their psychological group. Although individuals who identify with an organization may well indicate that they feel that they share experiences with a psychological group, this is not necessarily what the essence of OI consists of (especially as defined by Mael and Ashforth 1992). Other authors have also raised doubts about the content validity of the scale, with Abrams and de Moura (2001), for example, arguing that 'Mael and Ashforth's scale is predominantly concerned with public expressions of identification rather than its subjective meaning' (p. 137).

Mael and Ashforth's (1992) short scale has become one of the most widely used in the OI literature (e.g. Bamber and Iyer 2000; Moya and Bartol 2001; Van Knippenberg and Van Schie 2000; Van Knippenberg *et al.* 2002; Wiesenfeld *et al.* 1998) and shows good levels of reliability, with an average alpha of 0.85 across six reported studies (Mael and Ashforth 1992). Despite this, the Mael and Ashforth scale does not necessarily correspond closely to their original conceptualization of the construct. Moreover, despite arguing that OI is a cognitive construct, Mael and Ashforth (1992) include items in their measurement tool that are very likely to be tapping into affective states, a point also made by Van Dick (2001), who suggested that the emphasis of the measure is on evaluative and affective identification and that the cognitive element of the Mael and Ashforth scale 'is totally neglected' (p. 271).

Finally, an interesting alternative operationalization of OI that has been proposed recently is the single-item graphic scale developed by Bergami and Bagozzi (2000). Ver-

sions of the scale have also been used by Shamir and his colleagues (Shamir and Kark 2004; Shamir *et al.* 2000) and, in a large survey, by Dukerich *et al.* (2002). The scale relies on a graphical representation of the merging of identities between the individual and the organization and is an interesting development with regard to the measurement of OI. However, despite the graphics, this is ultimately a single-item scale and will require an assumption that the individual respondent has the same idea of what it means to identify with their work unit as the researcher does. In other words, the question risks some misinterpretation. Without other items to construct a reliable measure, this scale may well be problematic in terms of validity. Shamir and Kark (2004) accept this, arguing that their scale 'is not superior to verbal scales of organisational identification, only that it may be as useful as the verbal scales' (p. 121), suggesting that further work is needed to judge the worth of this new scale.

Organizational Commitment and Organizational Identification Contamination

Having reviewed some of the main measures of OI used by researchers over the past 30–40 years and having noted some of the key problems associated with these measures, this section concludes by considering the extent to which the conceptual overlap between OI and OC noted above also reproduces at the level of the measurement of the two concepts.

When one looks at the indicators used to measure OI and OC item by item, it does seem that there is considerable crossover in measurement. As examples, the item referring to the respondent feeling proud to be a member of the organization is included in the identification measurement presented by Hall *et al.* (1970) and Cheney (1982), as well as in the OC measures presented by Mowday *et al.* (1970) and by Cook and Wall (1980). Other indicators that seem to be used in both scales include items asking whether the respondent

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feels as though he/she shares the fate of the organization (either success or failure). These items appear in Cheney's questionnaire and in Mael and Ashforth's (1992) identification measure, as well as in the Mowday *et al.* (1979) and in the Meyer and Allen (1991) commitment scales. Also included in both sets of measures are indicators relating to the respondent's feeling a sense of belonging and membership or being a part of the organization. Items of this type are included in the Cheney (1982) measure of identification, as well as in the Cook and Wall (1980) and in the Meyer and Allen (1991) commitment scales. Many other examples of scale overlap could be given.

Miller *et al.* (2000), based on their evaluation of Cheney's measure (1982), concluded that, because the items were developed from job involvement commitment scales, the OIQ 'essentially provides a broad measure of commitment' (p. 648). More generally, the issue of overlap in measures used for identification and commitment has been explicitly addressed by Riketta (2005) in a recent meta-analysis. Riketta collected data from some 96 research studies that investigated OI, many of which also had some measures of attitudinal organizational commitment (AOC). In total, 62% of shared variance was found between the measures of commitment and those of identification. Immediately, this suggests a very high overlap in the two constructs. There is, however, 38% of the variance that is not shared between the two types of measure, and Riketta suggests that this indicates that 'OI as a measure in the typical OI study may well have unique features as compared with AOC in its common operational form' (p. 368). Indeed, this does suggest that there is not complete operational overlap between the two measures. This could well be explained by the fact that any composite measure of AOC will invariably have elements that are being accessed which are beyond what is being measured by OI (rather than vice versa). Indeed, it is likely to be the broader notion of OC that has unique features that the identifi-

cation measures do not pick up. For example, many AOC scales include some element of intentions to stay/leave, not commonly considered to be a part of OI.

Interestingly, Riketta (2005) found that different measures of identification have different levels of overlap with AOC. He also shows that OI in general tends to correlate less with absenteeism, intentions to leave and job satisfaction than does AOC. This potentially indicates that AOC is generally a broader notion than OI, as it is more likely to pick up on a range of attitudes that are likely to indicate how happy or satisfied the individual is with the organization (a point made by Pratt in 1998). Organizational identification, however, tends to correlate to a greater extent with OCB than with AOC. The explanation presented for this is that OI measures have more specific items that include sharing the goals of the organization and, as such, are more likely to have a stronger (and more specific) relationship with OCB or extra-role behaviour than would a broader measure such as AOC.

In summary, the above review suggests that there are significant limitations in the way OI has been operationalized over the last few decades. In particular, the main measures of OI that have been used by researchers in this area would appear to suffer from significant problems of face, and more fundamentally, of content validity. More generally, these problems highlight an important underlying methodological issue faced by researchers attempting to operationalize a latent psychological construct such as OI. This is the fact that it is difficult to measure such an internal psychological state with questionnaire items. The construction of questions designed to measure such a psychological state is a key step in the research process. If the questions are not carefully worded, they may not measure the psychological construct they are intended to tap, and the content validity of the measure will be correspondingly low.

Importantly, the review has also highlighted the substantial overlap that exists between main measures of OI and OC commonly used

by researchers and the difficulty, therefore, in trying to make a clear distinction between these two phenomena in practice. Significantly, this overlap in terms of measurement reflects, as we have seen, a more fundamental conceptual overlap between the two constructs. More generally, therefore, the present review directs attention to the fact that, in the process of clarifying the meaning of OI and developing an appropriate measure of the construct, it is centrally important that the researcher also addresses the problem of conceptual and operational overlap between OI and OC.

Summary and Conclusion

In the current review, the confusion in the literature concerning where the conceptual boundaries of OI lie, in particular in relation to its sister concept of OC, is set out. An important contribution of this review is that it firmly demonstrates that OI and OC are not the same concept. Figure 1 indicates how conceptual boundaries between the two constructs might be clarified. Organizational commitment is a broader, more general construct than OI, which has a more specific focus. Clarifying these boundaries is an important task, particularly given that there are likely to be different antecedents associated with each of the two constructs and indeed different outcomes. Assuming that identification and commitment are indeed important phenomena, with different antecedents and outcomes, it is essential that researchers and managers are able to understand clearly the distinction between the two.

When examining how the two notions have been conceptualized (see above), it is clear that the causes and outcomes of OI and OC can be expected to be different, depending on how they are conceptualized. For example, actual turnover might be expected to be more strongly related to conceptualizations of OC (e.g. Cook and Wall 1980) that include intentions to stay as a key part of the loyalty sub-construct, than to more specific conceptualizations of OI

that do not incorporate intention to stay as part of the definition of the OI construct. Similarly, given that the Meyer and Allen model includes involvement as a key constituent of the commitment construct, one would expect employee participation in organizational activities to correlate more strongly with this conceptualization of OC than with identification. The model presented in Figure 1 clearly separates involvement and intentions to stay from the core identification construct. Identification is indeed treated as a more specific construct than is commitment in this model and, as such, is explicitly expected to have fundamentally different sets of antecedents and outcomes than OC. It is not, therefore, just an academic exercise to ensure that the boundaries between OI and OC are clarified, as managers might find that having a clear view of what these two constructs actually entail can help them better to understand the specific implications of these two phenomena for different key employee attitudes and behaviour in the workplace.

Furthermore, if managers are interested in trying to foster commitment or identification, they may have to focus on encouraging different activities, given the expected differences in antecedents across the two constructs. Traditionally, the set of antecedents that are presented by social identity authors in relation to identification are different from those presented by commitment authors. For example, Ashforth and Mael (1989, 1996) proposed that workers are more likely to identify with an organization if it is distinctive from other organizations, with recognizable values, recognizable goals and if it has a strong and enduring identity. Additionally, if the organization is seen as prestigious with a positive image, individuals are more likely to identify with it. These antecedents, although likely to be important in the development of OC, are much more specific than those presented as important by commitment authors. The identification antecedents seem to focus, on the one hand, on what the organization is; the commitment antecedents, on the other hand,

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tend to draw attention more to what the organization does. As the OC antecedents are based on social exchange arguments, in particular, this will direct attention to highlight the particular human resource practices that an organization has in place that are likely to encourage the development of OC amongst employees (Guest 1987; Pfeffer 1998).

Examples of specific antecedents that have been linked theoretically and empirically to commitment are perceived organizational support (Eisenberger *et al.* 1986, 1990) and also the exchange mechanisms operating within the psychological contract (Guest and Conway 1997). It is argued that the organization will, through its practices and treatment of employees, encourage or discourage staff to be organizationally committed. In contrast, in relation to identification, a number of studies have shown a link between the perceived image of an organization and the extent to which employees identify with it (Mael and Ashforth 1992; also Smidts *et al.* 2001). Most recently, in one of the largest research projects to be carried out in the area, Dukerich *et al.* (2002) showed that attributes associated with the organization, and how attractive these attributes were perceived to be by the employees, predicted the extent to which respondents identified with the organization, as did the attractiveness of the construed external image. This study is an example of research into antecedents of identification as theorized by proponents of social identity theory and supports some of the propositions put forward in the Dutton *et al.* (1994) review article, including in particular the idea that the more attractive the image of the organization is, or the more positive are the perceptions of the organizations and its characteristics, the more likely people are to identify with that organization.

In summary, what the above studies suggest is that OC, both theoretically and empirically, can be expected to have an impact on a broader set of outcomes than can identification. They also suggest that the antecedents of OC relate more to how the organization treats

employees, while those of identification have more to do with what the organization stands for and with its image. Given this, it is essential that the overlap and differences between the two constructs be clarified, as this review has attempted to do.

Directions for Future Research

This review has tracked the development of the concept of OI over the last fifty years or so and highlighted some key issues that remain to be resolved in terms of how the notion is conceptualized and measured. Importantly, the review shows that the key areas remaining contentious relate to the extent to which the notion of OI includes an affective element as well as to its the exact conceptual crossover with OC. Furthermore, how OI has been operationalized has been reviewed, and many of the main measures of OI seem similar to the tools used to measure OC. To a degree, when looking at the two literatures on identification and commitment, it would appear that the two psychological constructs have been operating concurrently for many years, almost to the point that they are competing for the same research ground. It is clear from the review that the overlap of the two concepts is considerable, and more recent conceptualizations of identification (e.g. that presented by Van Dick 2001) continue this by extending the range of psychological states that the construct is argued as covering. It does seem clear from recent discussions that OI will necessarily involve some affective component. It can definitely be argued that it would be a major omission to ignore such an affective element as a key part to identification, particularly as it is suggested that this psychological state has such a big impact on an individual's self-concept.

The model of OI presented in Figure 1 is designed to clarify where the conceptual boundaries lie between the two notions. OI can be considered to be a core sub-component of commitment. It involves a cognitive element, where individuals effectively categorize

themselves as a member of the organization, and they share its values and goals. It also includes an affective element where the individual feels a sense of membership and belonging with an emotional link or attachment to the organization. Aspects such as loyalty and involvement can be seen as notions separate from, yet related to, OI, while being part of the wider notion of OC. Even one of the most used conceptualizations of commitment, that of affective commitment, proposed by Meyer and Allen (1991), can be seen to be broader than the conceptualization of identification presented here. The notion of identification presented here involves a significant psychological linkage between the individual and the organization, whereby the individual feels a deep, self-defining affective and cognitive bond with the organization as a social entity. Affective commitment, however, is said to involve 'the employee's emotional attachment to, identification-with, and involvement-in the organisation' (Meyer and Allen 1991, 67). The definition of identification presented here may involve an emotional attachment, but involvement is deemed to be outside the scope of what identification is considered to include.

Importantly, aspects of identification that include behaviours and some form of evaluation of one's membership of the organization may well be expected to follow when somebody identifies with an organization, but these are potentiated by an initial cognitive and affective linkage. Importantly, psychological states such the evaluation of membership and intentions to act (or actual behaviours) are aspects that fall outside the core construct of identification. In using Cheney and Tompkins' (1987) distinction between identification and commitment, commitment involves an additional step, as it encapsulates intentions to act as well as potential actions and reactions to perceived organizational performance. The model presented here, as well providing a parsimonious conceptualization of OI, also helps show how the notion fits with other cognate concepts, such as OC and organizational citizenship behaviour. In view of the importance

given to these constructs in the organizational behaviour and management literature, such clarification provides a valuable contribution to the field. Further research is needed to provide a rigorous operationalization of the concept, where the items link specifically to the two core sub-components of affective and cognitive identification and to present measures that are also linked to the three separate components that are potentiated by this state of identification.

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